

ICPS newsletter[®]

Criminalizing drug addicts won't stem the spread of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine

Ukraine leads in indicators for the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic among post-soviet countries. To date, the main mode of transmitting the virus is injecting drug use. Government policy of fighting drug addiction as though it were a crime and not a disease has not yielded any results and should be changed into a strategy of "harm reduction." This kind of strategy involves reducing criminal pressure upon drug addicts, changing social attitudes towards the problems of such patients, and re-integrating them into society once more. Achieving concrete results in the battle against the scourge of HIV/AIDS requires that the public and the government join forces

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus—the disease agent that leads to AIDS—continues to spread in Ukraine at an extremely high pace. Whereas in 2002, the country was registering 500–600 new HIV cases per month on average, in 2004, the indicator has jumped to 900.¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as much as 1% of the adult population (age 15–49) may be infected in Ukraine, the highest rate among post-soviet countries.

The key factor in the spread of HIV in Ukraine is injecting drug users (IDUs). According to different estimates, about 80% of all cases are linked to injecting drugs and today there may be as many as 800,000 injecting drug addicts.

The current government policy, which treats drug addiction as an illegal behavior, has not only yielded zero results, but it has brought about a slew of negative consequences:

- violations of human rights;
- the marginalization of IDUs, which complicates both HIV/AIDS preventive measures and the treatment of drug addiction;
- more risky behavior among IDUs, which results in breaking the law and spreads HIV even further.

From criminalization to harm reduction

An effective method to prevent HIV spread and reduce other negative fallout from drug addiction in Ukraine could be introducing a strategy of harm reduction, which shifts the

emphasis from fighting drug addiction and cutting off drug intake to preventive measures against the negative medical, social, economic and legal consequences facing IDUs who cannot or are not ready to quit their habits. The strategy of harm reduction has been officially recognized by WHO as an effective preventive method against the spread of both HIV and drug addiction. There are numerous examples proving its high effectiveness. This method is widely applied in democratic countries, including the US, Lithuania and Poland.

The ideology of harm-reduction strategies is based on the understanding that:

- a certain part of the population will always take drugs, therefore any strategy should focus, not on combatting drugs, but on reducing the harm from drug use;
- the condemnation of drug users has no place, since their choice is never absolutely independent and drug addiction is often a way of escaping their personal and social failures;
- the negative impact of drug abuse needs to be reduced for both the user and for society;
- preventive measures against HIV are cheaper than treatment of AIDS.

Introducing a strategy of harm reduction means cutting down the criminal prosecution of IDUs and aiming government policy instruments at social rehabilitation of the sick. First of all, this means changes in the social welfare and healthcare systems for drug addicts and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA).

Changes in healthcare should ensure better access of this category of patients to medical services, raising the quality of services provided, improving and developing programs for medical rehabilitation, introducing replacement therapy programs, and changing attitudes among medical workers towards drug addicts and PLHA.

At the same time, it makes sense to start an information campaign work in the wider society to eliminate discrimination against IDUs and PLHA, change attitudes among social workers towards them, and improve work with young people and their parents.

Scattered efforts yield few results

For many years now, a large number of national and foreign NGOs have been dealing with the problem of preventive measures against HIV/AIDS in Ukraine. Significant amounts of technical assistance have been provided to support these efforts. The Ukrainian government has also shown interest by adopting legislation and normative documents. However, the results of all this have been mostly local, they have been neither stable nor systematic, and they have not led to real changes in government policy and in Ukrainian society as a whole.

The reason for this is the lack of a publically approved national policy against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The activities of different participants in this process are going in different directions. The efforts of different NGOs are being dissipated: for lack of public dialog, none of the efforts have broad-based public support. The harm-reduction strategy has not been recognized by the government or made a policy priority.

Harm reduction should become the national policy

The necessary conditions for achieving real change are concentrating efforts on clearly-defined and realistic goals,

¹ Data from the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine (<http://www.aidsalliance.kiev.ua>).

attracting broadbased interest in these goals among the population, and gaining substantial public support. This should provide the means to put powerful public pressure on the government. To achieve these goals, Ukraine needs support for applying the widespread experience of democratic countries of introducing general national campaigns on public policy.

The International Centre for Policy Studies and the All-Ukrainian Harm Reduction Association, jointly financed by the IRF, have started implementing the "Public Lobbying of the Drug Addiction Harm

Reduction Strategy" project. The project's goal is to lobby and carrying out activities that will contribute to:

- consolidating efforts and gaining public support for introducing the "Drug Addiction Harm Reduction in Ukraine" strategy; and,
- achieving systemic changes in preventing the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and overseeing drug traffic in Ukrainian society in the interests of drug users and HIV-positive individuals.

The project includes carrying out policy research on problems and prospects of

reducing harm from drug addiction, organizing a nationwide debate with representatives of stakeholders, developing and submitting the project's outcomes to the Verkhovna Rada and the Government, along with recommendations for necessary legislative amendments, and government policy measures. The project will be carried out in cooperation with a new Public Expert Council under the Verkhovna Rada Committee for Healthcare, Motherhood and Childhood. ■

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Can ISO-quality municipal services be provided in Ukraine?

Local governments have to change from the role of administrator to that of public service provider, the assessment of which will depend how satisfied their customers are. The quality of such services can be ensured by applying ISO 9001:2000 quality procedures and standards, which are not only for business use

One of the goals of administrative reform in Ukraine is "forming a government system that will be responsive to people's needs and demands and its top priority will be serving the people and the national interest. This system will be controlled by the people and it will be transparent, effective and developed according to scientific principles." In terms of context, this quotation is very close to the issue raised at the international conference on evaluating and standardizing services provided by local governments to their populations, organized under the People's Voice project of the World Bank, PADCO and the International Centre for Policy Studies.

Applying ISO 9001:2000 to municipal services

The International Standards Organization concept does not envisage setting direct quality standards for services such as water temperature, waiting period for obtaining a permit, and so on, but rather determining the conformity of the quality management system of local governments to standards for regularly ensuring quality of services.

This raises an interesting question: Are ISO 9001:2000 norms really the only method for improving quality management systems in local government bodies in reality? Certainly not. Rather, the formal, standardized set of norms, the accountability requirements of management, the process analysis and monitoring, improvement activities, and the requirements for a document-flow system

encourage an organization to improve the quality of its performance.

How can municipal service quality be measured?

International practice shows that municipal governments can provide such services as issuing permits, supporting educational and medical facilities, social security, organizing recreation, environmental protection, all kinds of basic public services, and so on.

Without evaluating and measuring quality, there is no way to improve the quality and effectiveness of services. City mayors bear a civic responsibility before their voters for the quality of municipal services and they need to organize a system for measuring the quality of services by collecting information from:

- citizens (consumer satisfaction polls, consumer surveys, and so on);
- municipal officials (data on input resources, outputs, expenditures, technical limits for rendering services, and so on);
- independent agencies and bodies (for example, the state sanitation bureau).

Berdiansk and Komsomolsk: local governments apply the ISO 9001:2000 system

Ukraine already has examples of the successful introduction of quality management systems in local governments based on ISO 9001:2000 standards.

In 2003, the executive committee of Berdiansk Municipal Council received an ISO quality certificate. Prior to this, the committee had spent a year on preparatory work, including training personnel, organizing the structure of the municipal executive committee, and developing the necessary documents according to requirements of ISO 9001:2000 quality standards.

Among the nest of problems facing Berdiansk, specialists named a cynical attitude towards innovations, lack of knowledge, reluctance to reveal and identify problems, the actual workload of employees, conflicts between innovations and established practices, and financial limitations.

In January 2004, a project to introduce ISO 9001:2000 was launched in Komsomolsk. The city has not been certified yet, as it is still at the preparatory stage, but results are already visible.

The conference repeatedly mentioned that receiving a certificate should not be the final goal of organizing a city's system, since it is only an instrument for improving management. The process of re-orienting an organization's operation towards the ISO standard format is clearly very useful. ■

The report was prepared using materials from "Evaluating and Standardizing Municipal Services Quality: Problems and Prospects," an international conference organized by the People's Voice project of the World Bank, PADCO and ICPS in Kyiv on 14-16 July 2004. The project is financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For additional information, contact Volodymyr Hnat by telephone at (380-44) 236-4116 or via e-mail at vhnat@icps.kiev.ua.

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